

T. Thomas Fortune House (Bergen House)
(Maple Hall)
94 West Bergen Place
Red Bank
Monmouth County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-877

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PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

T. THOMAS FORTUNE HOUSE (Bergen House)
(Maple Hall)

HABS No. NJ-877

Location: 94 W. Bergen Place, Red Bank, Monmouth County, New Jersey

Present Use: residential

Present Owner and Occupant: James and Maria Vaccarelli

Significance: Born a slave, crusading journalist T. Thomas Fortune eventually owned and operated three newspapers which he used to fight against corrupt politicians and for civil rights for blacks and women. During the course of his career, he published over 20 books and articles as well as writing more than 300 editorials in his own newspapers and others. Fortune resided here from 1901-1915.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of construction: circa 1885
2. Alterations and additions: In 1917, the two story structure was enlarged to provide two additional bedrooms, a larger kitchen, and a larger family dining room. The previous dining room was converted into a living room while the living room became a sitting room. In 1918 a one story bakery was added.

- B. Historical Context: Timothy Thomas Fortune was born a slave in Marianna, Florida on October 3, 1856. His father, Emanuel, had been taught the rudiments of reading and writing as well as the trades of shoemaking and tanning, two factors which gave him an advantage over other freed slaves during the post-Civil War years. After the war Emanuel Fortune became active in Reconstruction politics but eventually lost favor among conservative whites and had his life threatened. He escaped with his family to Jacksonville, Florida but lost his profitable farm and home.

Timothy acquired both formal and informal education in Florida. While in Marianna and Jacksonville, he attended Freedmen's Bureau schools and picked up a knowledge of the printer's trade from observation in the office of the Marianna Courier. This printing shop was the first of several in which Fortune worked.

At age 13 he began his political apprenticeship in Tallahassee, Florida, where he was a page in the State Senate and learned first-hand about political corruption and the exploitation of blacks and whites in politics. Fortune's distrust of political parties and his attitude toward race relations were influenced greatly by his ten years in the State Capital.

Fortune left Florida at the age of 19 and entered Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1876. The 1870s were years of testing and searching for future goals for Fortune. He married Carrie Smiley, and they lived in Washington, D.C. for awhile while he sought political opportunities. Finally, with the birth of the new decade, Fortune decided to enter the field of journalism. While in Washington he met the editor of the People's Advocate, John Wesley Cromwell, for whom he worked and by whom he was influenced in 1881 to found The New York Globe, his first newspaper. By age 24, Fortune had launched a dynamic career as a journalist, spokesperson, and leader that was to last for over 20 years.

Fortune's tenure of nearly uninterrupted editorship lasted from 1881 to 1907. His newspapers included The New York Globe, The New York Freeman, and The New York Age. Throughout this period as Fortune was developing his journalistic capabilities, his newspapers were widely read by both blacks and whites in the north and south.

The aim of the Globe was to provide a national forum for American blacks. Like other black newspapers, the Globe was barred from membership in the Associated Press. This problem prompted Fortune's former employer, John Cromwell, to call a convention of black editors and publishers in Louisville in order to establish the Colored Press Association. The CPA was to be influential in Fortune's rise to leadership in the black community.

The Globe's editorials attacked the white press for either neglecting or persecuting blacks, admonished Republicans for abandoning support of blacks, and encouraged blacks to become politically independent in light of Republican party neglect. As a result of his attacks upon Republicans, black party members withdrew their financial support from the newspaper, which went out of business in November, 1884.

During the 1880s and 1890s, the issues that preoccupied Fortune were racial uplift and interracial relations. During the last few months of his editorship of the Globe, Fortune wrote his book, Black and White, which appeared in 1884. The book dealt with two themes: the condition of the race, and the unification of poor whites and poor blacks. Most of his observations about race relations and his solutions to the problems created by racism in America had been formulated throughout the ten years that preceded publication of his book, and had been explored in the Globe. He assailed not only the white press but also white historians who distorted the images of

blacks, Native Americans, and women. He criticized the Federal government and the Supreme Court for refusing to enforce the rights of blacks. In 1883, Fortune attacked the Supreme Court for declaring the Civil Rights Act of 1875 invalid, and advised blacks to protect themselves if their government refused to do so.

His militancy stimulated critical responses from the white southern press and some black papers such as the Cincinnati Afro-American. Fortune went on to describe the phenomenon of racism which he believed was not only caused but perpetuated by capitalism.

Fortune maintained throughout the early 1880s that power resided with the group that owned the land. In later years, Booker T. Washington would express a similar ideology, but Fortune was more radical in his expression. He also appealed to blacks to be thrifty and industrious. Fortune fought against the concentration of wealth among only a few capitalists who he claimed exploited the poor. From his perspective, both poor white southerners and poor black southerners had a common enemy but he realized that racism prevented the two from fighting together. He felt that eventually, however, the battle in the south would be between capitalists and laborers rather than between blacks and whites.

One month after closing the Globe Fortune published the New York Freeman, which had many of the same aims of the former publication. Fortune, the sole owner, claimed that the paper was published solely for blacks, by blacks, and was free of party politics. However, by 1886, Fortune was forced to enter into a financial agreement with whites because of an alleged lack of support from the black community. Nevertheless, outstanding black journalists such as John E. Bruce of New York, whose pen name was Bruce Grit; Gertrude Mossell of Philadelphia; and the young Ida B. Wells, of Memphis, whose pen name was Iola, contributed articles to the Freeman. The paper still was not a financial success and in 1887 Fortune discontinued the editorship of it in order to undertake free-lance writing. Jerome B. Peterson edited the paper and Fortune's younger brother, Emanuel, became the business manager. The name of the paper became the New York Age with the new editor announcing that it would support Republican politics. Perhaps Fortune realized that alienation of the Republican Party could bring financial disaster, especially since he was campaigning for the Democratic presidential hopeful Cleveland.

After the death of his brother, Fortune returned to edit the Age. Grover Cleveland died shortly afterward and so had Fortune's hope for blacks in the Democratic Party. By 1889, he renounced the party while still speaking critically of the Republicans. As a result of his changing political loyalty, many blacks distrusted his political acumen. Despite his change of parties, however, his views on racial issues remained consistent and militant. Thus, when he organized the National Afro-American League in 1887, many black leaders responded.

The League worked against the political and civil suppression of the rights of blacks in the south, fought inequalities in education and the prison system, and attacked discrimination in public accommodations nationwide. Although Fortune's tone was militant, he urged the use of peaceful methods. Black leadership responded positively in the press and in organizational meetings. The white southern press denounced the idea as a vehicle for perpetuating racial tension. Despite the initial enthusiastic response, the League failed to make the impact that Fortune hoped for on a national level. There were, however, successes on the local level. The lack of support from national leaders such as Frederick Douglass and John Langston was a contributing factor, but inadequate financial support was the major cause of the League's failure.

By 1900, Fortune felt that public opinion had grown more anti-black than it had been during Reconstruction. Once again, he blamed the south and the Supreme Court. Abandoning his earlier hopes of a black-white alliance, Fortune advised blacks to seek solutions among themselves. He looked to the day when labor unions would accept blacks. Although his commentary had mellowed with time, Fortune's basic philosophy about racism and blacks in the economy had not substantially changed. During the 1880s he encouraged blacks to support unionism and not to act as strike breakers. A generation of union activity had convinced him, however, that organized labor was entrenched in racism and would be unable and unwilling to change.

Fortune was also concerned about education in the 1880s. His views reflected bitterness as he denounced the south for shirking its responsibility to pay for the education of its former slaves. He called for a federal bureau of education and for appropriations from Congress. On the other hand, he initially admonished white northern "missionaries" who had come to the south to teach the freedmen because he felt they had condescending attitudes that were stripping dignity from blacks. By 1900, however, his bitterness had subsided and he praised the work of the "New England pioneers" who he felt had not only influenced the professional development of black men in the south, but had taught the women of the race as well.

Fortune consistently defended the rights of blacks to equal educational opportunities and emphasized the need for industrial education in particular. According to Fortune, the masses of blacks needed elementary and industrial training and he predicted that schools would have to realize the necessity for both academic and manual education.

Ideologically, T. Thomas Fortune was not a separatist like Bishop J.M. Turner whose back-to-Africa movement received Fortune's criticism during the 1890s. Although Fortune also disagreed with Marcus Garvey's brand of separatism, he admired many of the Universal Negro Improvement Association's (UNIA) ideas about racial pride and self-sufficiency.

Fortune did not advocate the early twentieth century views about racial purity and admonished men such as Alexander Crummell and others in the American Negro Academy who discouraged black men from marrying mulatto women in order to keep the race pure. In Fortune's opinion, blacks did not need two color lines. He argued that the majority of the race was already racially mixed. His solution to the problem of establishing racial identity was the adoption of the term "Afro-American" because he felt that other terms did not accurately describe the physical make-up of the race.

Protecting the rights of the women of the race was an area of great concern to Fortune, who encouraged women to fight for their rights. He admired black women with leadership abilities such as Ida B. Wells, Victoria Earl Matthews, Margaret Murray Washington, and Gertrude Mossell. Under his leadership, women were encouraged to participate in the National Afro-American League because they too were denied their civil rights and because he believed black women were usually better educated than black men and therefore were better prepared to work toward racial uplift.

In 1895, Fortune attended the first meeting of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, where he was one of the three male speakers. He described conference participants as "New Afro-American Women," who were ready to work to help themselves and the race as a whole. Fortune followed the activities of the National Federation of Afro-American Women and the National League of Colored Women, both of which united to form the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. He hoped that the women of the race would be more successful in maintaining a national organization to promote the welfare of the race than the men had been in the past.

One of Fortune's most outstanding campaigns was his effort to assist Ida B. Wells' crusade against lynching. Wells had written in protest against the lynching of three black men in Memphis in 1892. While she was visiting in New Jersey, the office of her paper, the Memphis Free Speech, was destroyed and her life threatened. Fortune learned of the incident before she did, warned her of the danger, and offered her the use of the Age to continue her fight. Through his contacts with women such as Victoria Earl Matthews in New York, Wells was able to launch her international crusade against lynching in America.

The relationship that developed between T. Thomas Fortune and Booker T. Washington represented a turning point in the lives of both men, one in which Fortune was forced to deal with the contradiction of his life as well as his development as a leader. The men met during the 1890s, while Fortune was touring the south. Both men believed that they were working toward the same goal--racial uplift--but they chose different means to that end. In the long run, the avenue chosen by Washington, accommodation, was the one most acceptable to the power

structure in America. The means advocated, but not always followed by Fortune, was resistance, the antithesis of Washington's philosophy. Herein lies the Fortune dilemma. He was unable to compromise on the issues of civil rights, yet his inability to avoid becoming financially and politically dependent upon Washington was the key to his mental breakdown in 1907. During the 1890s, the two men had complimented one another. Although Fortune played the role of northern agitator, he also defended and interpreted Washington's views to his critics. At times, however, they differed privately for Fortune did not believe in making concessions to whites. Despite their differences, Fortune remained a close confidant and ghost writer for Washington who at the same time provided financial support for the Age.

A series of events occurred in the lives of the two men which drove Fortune into personal conflict and finally into the depression that led to his breakdown. Heightened race terror in the south led to the revival of the League in 1898, when it was renamed the Afro-American Council. Fortune spoke in militant words, but his fear of alienating his benefactor caused him to use the Council as a means of promoting Washington's leadership. He did this by cooperating in attempts to either silence or discredit opposition to Washington among Council members.

Another dilemma for Fortune was his attitude toward Theodore Roosevelt. Although Fortune privately criticized the President's southern policy, he refrained from criticizing Roosevelt publicly because he hoped for a political appointment through Washington's influence. Finally, in 1904, Fortune was appointed Special Immigrant Agent of the Treasury Department to study race and trade conditions in the Philippines. As he departed for his tour, Washington warned him not to make any politically damaging statements. Despite Fortune's attempts to remain quiet, he could not help but comment upon the racism that was shown toward the Filipinos by whites.

Although Washington continued to subsidize the Age after 1904, he no longer trusted Fortune. The last major difference between the two was over Fortune's public criticism of Roosevelt's handling of the Brownsville, Texas incident wherein the President indicted black soldiers for the race riot that had occurred in the town. Displeased with Fortune, Washington finally withdrew his financial support of the Age and severed their personal relationship.

Fortune virtually withdrew from public life to the home he purchased in 1901 in Red Bank, New Jersey, only to encounter marital problems and the loss of his home in 1915. Shortly after the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915, Fortune became editor of the Colored American Review and the publishers announced proudly that he had recovered fully from his breakdown.

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Although Fortune never fully regained his former prestige, he did work for several more black newspapers. His most important contribution during his last years was to the Negro World, the official organ of the UNIA, which Fortune began to edit in 1923. His last editorial appeared June 9, 1928, along with his obituary notice. Fortune was widely eulogized in the black press.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General Statement: The T. Thomas Fortune House's original structure was a two-story "L" shaped building with an unfinished attic. The first floor contained a living room, dining room, kitchen, and a rear storage room. The second floor housed three bedrooms. Alterations took place as described above. The structure is an example of picturesque eclecticism, with its many details, eye catching patterns, references to a variety of styles, and informal massing.

PART III. SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Fortune, T. Thomas, House. National Historic Landmark nomination form, 1976.

Prepared and transmitted by: Holly K. Chamberlain
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